

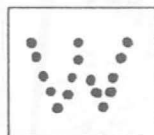
Great Western Railway perfin deserves more study

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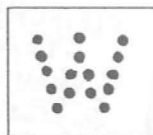
I read with interest Joe Coulbourne's Great Western Railway article in the March 2001 *Bulletin* and as a result of my recent analysis of these early "GR/W" dies, I can add the following information.

1. Yes, there is an earlier railway cover known—this also has the GR/W perfin and was posted in West London on 13 March 1869. Also from the same era, I have three stamps (a single and a pair) off cover with the GE/R perfin postmarked London EC, 23 July 1869, on 1d Red plate 118.

2. The illustration given for G4350.02 is correct but this would **not** have been the die used on the stamp on Joe's 1869 cover, as that die was not made until 1871. The stamp on the cover would have been initialled with an earlier die with very fine pins and a completely different shape to the centre of the W—more like an inverted straight-sided V. I believe this die to be the original state of the 'ugly' GR/W die G4350.01, which I have now catalogued as G4350.01a.



Early Vee



Later shape

Space doesn't permit me to go into the fine detail as to why, but

based on the tiny variations observed in the patterns, I am confident that there were TWO early GR/W dies represented by G4350.01a. Both were multiheaded 6x1 (i.e. 6 patterns in one horizontal line), bestowing the suffix M to the catalogue number.

The fineness of the perforating pins would have greatly reduced the number of sheets of stamps that could be initialled in one go without risking the pins buckling. I guess when Joseph Sloper made the original dies in 1868 he probably couldn't have envisaged the enormous use that the Great Western Railway would make of his initialling process to protect their postage stamps. After all, the ubiquitous GR/W pattern is one of the more common perfin patterns to be found on the G.B. Queen Victoria 1d Reds, so much so that at one stage you almost couldn't give them away!

But to get back to the plot!

To allow more sheets to be initialled in one go I think Joseph Sloper, as an engineer, would have made two modifications to the dies. He would have replaced the very fine pins with ones with a larger diameter to make them more stable in compression and less likely

to buckle. However, this would have naturally increased the load required from the initialling press, so to counteract this, he simply took out the

conversion to the 'ugly' 13 pin W format [G4350.01a] taking place during the summer/autumn of 1869. One of the modified dies appears to have been

G4350.01a



1968-1869

G4350.01



1869-1871

G4350.02



1871-1881

three pins from the top of the W. Early strikes from the modified dies are still crisp, but shortly afterwards the dies seem to suffer from extreme wear and on occasions pins run into each other. Towards the end they had become very 'tatty' indeed.

Very early Queen Victoria 1d Red plate numbers point to an early 1868 date for the manufacture of the 'original' GR/W dies [G4350.01], with the

used more frequently than the other, an observation that proved crucial in the successful re-construction of the dies. Current research indicates that the replacement die(s) [G4350.02] were made during the spring/summer of 1871. I am currently working on the reconstruction of the replacement GR/W die(s), but fear this will prove a more difficult puzzle to solve.